

this work done and needs to get it done the right way.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mr. UDALL of Colorado). The Senator from Washington is recognized.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, 3 weeks ago I sent a letter to families across my home State of Washington asking for their help as we reform our broken health care system. I told them I wanted to pass a plan that protects existing coverage when it is good, improves it when it is not, and guarantees care for the millions who have none. I asked them to share their stories with me and ideas about how to make this vision a reality. I told them that I know health care is a very personal issue, but also that personal stories have the power to change minds and transform debates. The response to my request has been simply overwhelming.

I wish to share some of the stories that have been pouring into my office—over 5,000 so far—because they underscore not only the desperate need to fix our broken health care system but also the dire necessity to get it done this year.

For too many families today, health care reform can't wait. I wish to share a story from a letter I received from Rita from Seattle who sent me a story about her sister Janet. Janet was unemployed and had lost her health insurance when her throat began to hurt one day back in 2004. She paid out of her own pocket to visit a health clinic and was sent home with antibiotics. Well, weeks later, she was still in a lot of pain and finally managed to get an appointment with a specialist, but she was told she had to wait 6 weeks more to come in to get help. Only after begging them for an appointment was she seen by the specialist 3 days later and was told that the pain she had been living with was in the late stages of an aggressive form of throat cancer. Janet died not long after that. It was a death that would have been prevented had she been able to see a specialist earlier.

Janet is not alone. A woman by the name of Kathleen from Puyallup, WA, sent in a story about her friend Kelly. Kelly had just been laid off from work when she came down with what she thought was the flu. She didn't have any health insurance because she had been laid off from her job and she couldn't afford to go to the doctor, so she waited. Two weeks later she felt even worse, so she finally made an appointment to go in for a checkup. Kelly never made it to the doctor. Her 7-year-old son found her dead on the couch on the morning she was supposed to go in. She died from an untreated ovarian cyst. Because Kelly didn't have health insurance, that little boy no longer has a mother.

I think the fact that these stories are possible in the greatest and richest

country in the world is simply shameful. No son should lose a mother simply because she can't afford care. No family should have to watch a loved one suffer because insurance companies instead of doctors are making the decisions. That is why we so badly need to reform our health care system this year.

Our country has been working on this issue for over 60 years and we have spent months and months this session alone working to put together a reform package that works for all Americans. We have had over 6 months of hearings. We went through over 50 hours of public markups. We debated over 200 amendments. So when I hear some of my colleagues from across the aisle saying we should slow down, saying we should take more time, or that we are trying to reform health care too fast, and when I see some of them shrugging off every attempt we have made at engaging them and bringing them into the process, I think of Kelly and I think of Janet and I think of all of the families out there right now with sick husbands or sick wives or sick kids. I think of all the small business owners I have talked to who can't cover their employees. I think of the people who have coverage, but are worried about losing it today in this uncertain economy. I think about all the working Americans who are paying a hidden tax today in the form of rising premiums in order to cover those Americans who don't have access to care. As a mother and as a Senator, I say enough is enough.

Yesterday we heard some pretty ugly and blatant rhetoric. One Member of the Senate who wants to protect the status quo, who doesn't want to make any changes, said: "If we're able to stop Obama on this, it will be his Waterloo. It will break him."

That is playing games with real lives in order to score cheap political points. Bucking health care reform isn't going to break the President of the United States. It will break American families. It will break American businesses. It is going to break the bank.

Americans deserve better. The families of Janet and Kelly and the thousands of others who have written me deserve better. We can't play politics with what is most important to our Nation's families—the health of their loved ones.

They say justice delayed is justice denied. Well, health care delayed is often health care denied. It was denied to Kelly, it was denied to Janet, and it gets denied to more Americans every single day we wait.

I call on all of our colleagues here in the Senate to work with us to rise above partisanship. We have a good plan right now. We are working to listen and bring everybody in and make it better. It will rein in the costs with the goal of lowering them across the long term. It will make sure all Americans have high quality, affordable coverage.

This issue is not going to go away if we don't do anything. It is not going to

get better or easier if we wait. In fact, today, costs are rising at an unsustainable rate for those who do have insurance and more and more Americans are losing their insurance every day.

We have been talking about reforming the health care system for a very long time. I go home to my home State of Washington every weekend, and I am asked often now if it is the right time to tackle health care reform. In these difficult and challenging economic times when people are worried about paying their bills, worried about losing their jobs, worried about what is coming around the corner, they ask me if we are biting off more than we can chew. I tell them: This is exactly the time we need to act. Premiums are rising three times faster than wages today. Every day, 14,000 more Americans lose their health insurance. In these already difficult times, I don't want to add losing health insurance to the list of concerns our families have to deal with every day.

We know the current system is unsustainable. Even those people with good coverage today are faced with massive costs and rising premiums. That is why tackling this problem now has to be part of our long-term economic recovery program.

Without health care reform, family budgets are going to continue to be strapped, more Americans are going to lose their care, and we are going to hear more stories like Janet and Kelly. I hope we can put aside the partisan rhetoric, I hope we can put aside the talk of: Slow this down; it is too fast. This issue is imperative, and I urge my colleagues to act.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

CONCEALED CARRY RECIPROCITY

Mr. BURRIS. Mr. President, I rise today to express my strong opposition to Senator THUNE's amendment regarding concealed carry reciprocity. This legislation ignores the explosion of gun crime plaguing America's cities and putting an unnecessary burden on local law enforcement.

In my home State of Illinois, an entire generation of young people, many of whom live in urban areas, is being decimated with gun violence. On May 10 of 2007, a 16-year-old honor student named Blair Holt was shot to death while riding a Chicago city bus. When the shooter opened fire, Blair was shot while protecting a young girl with whom he was riding. The shooter was also a 16-year-old boy and an admitted member of the Gangster Disciples national street gang. Just the other day, justice was presented to him when he was given 100 years in prison by the judge.

Similar tragic stories have only grown more frequent. In the first 6 months of 2009, Chicago alone logged 202 homicides, 84 percent of whom were